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CENTRAL AMERICA PALMER: Costa Rica fears it is sliding into or being
/U.S. AID pushed into Central America's widening circle of violence,
and it isn't sure what to do about that. Neither is anyone
else. As John Chancellor points out in his commentary
tonight, there are two points of view about what should be
done in Central America but hardly any common ground
between them. John?

CHANCELLOR: One of the most widely quoted remarks in
years was made last week by former President Nixon. He
was talking about the struggle in Central America between
the right and the left. Mr. Nixon said, 'The communists
at least talk about the problems, and too often we just
talk about the communists.' There's been a lot of talk
recently about the communists. The president said last
week that the Soviet Union, Cuba and Nicaragua are, in his
words, 'trying to install communism by force throughout
the Western hemisphere.' His assistant for national
security affairs, Robert McFarlane, said on Meet the Press
that CIA-style covert action was a proper way of combating
communist subversion in places like Central America.
Otherwise, he said, the president's options would be
limited to going to war or doing nothing. So as this
administration official sees it, the choices are war,
secret war or defeat. There is another option, of course.
That is, negotiation. Mexico, Panama, Venezuela and
Colombia are trying for a negotiated settlement through
the Contadora process. But in his half-hour address last
Wednesday, Mr. Reagan mentioned the Contadora Group only
once and hardly talked at all about the problems of
poverty, tyranny and illiteracy in Central America. It is
hard to predict how this bellicose talk will go down with
the public. The polls show that while the American people
don't want another Cuba in Central America, they don't
want another Vietnam either. But there was the
president's man on TV last Sunday warning of a Tet-like
attack, a large communist offensive in El Salvador next
fall. That kind of talk scares people. No wonder Mr.
Nixon's remark is getting so much attention.